

Hall  
Ling 503  
Spring 2006

### Homework 3: Classifying Speech Sounds

A. In each of the following groups, all of the segments *except one* share a common characteristic or set of characteristics (e.g. all are bilabial stops except one, etc.). For each group, indicate which segment “does not belong” in the group, and explain what the other segments all have in common.

1. t č c š j ʃ

2. d p c q x ʃ g

3. u ö ʌ w i o e

4. β G ð γ ʒ v f

B.<sup>1</sup> The following is a list of some singular nouns in English:

*lip, rock, tree, latch, gum, myth, laugh, two, cove, toe, bell, wretch, rib, load, breeze, fuzz, smudge, hen, law, bar, bat, tea, garage, turf, lash, row, lunch, tray, tag, stick, hinge, witch*

1. Classify the above nouns according to the plural endings they require:

[-tʒ]:

[-s]:

[-z]:

2. If you speak English reasonably well, this classification task should have been fairly easy for you. It is part of your knowledge of English to be able to produce the correct plural forms of most words when you see or hear the singular. Suppose we ask the question: how do speakers of English do this? In what form do speakers of English “internalize” their knowledge of plural formation? Consider each of the following four possibilities:

**Hypothesis A:** English speakers memorize the plural form for every noun they come across.

**Hypothesis B:** English speakers learn the plural form on the basis of the spelling of the words. For instance, they learn that the words that end with the letter <p> in the singular form the plural by adding [-s].

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from an exercise by Beth Hume.

**Hypothesis C:** English speakers know that the sound (rather than the letter) in which the singular ends determines the pronunciation of the plural ending. They have thus memorized a list of English segments that will be followed by the plural ending [-s], another list that will be followed by [-z], and a third list that will be followed by [-ɪz].

**Hypothesis D:** English speakers know that if the singular ends in a sound of a certain *type*, the plural ending will be [-s], that if it ends in a sound of another type it will be [-z], and that if it ends in a sound of a third type it will be [-ɪz]. In other words, speakers have not memorized three lists of speech sounds for the purpose of plural formation; instead, they have learned which sound types (or classes) are relevant.

3. Which of these hypotheses do you think is correct? Give an example of a word (either real or one you make up) and its plural that would falsify each of the other three hypotheses.

4. Write out the knowledge you think English speakers have about plural formation, following the hypothesis you picked in (3). That is: if you picked hypothesis A, write out the plural form for every English noun you know; if you picked hypothesis B, write out the letters that correspond to each of the three possible plural endings; if you picked hypothesis C, write out the list of sounds that correspond to each of the plural endings; and if you picked hypothesis D, write out the *type* or class of sound that corresponds to each of the plural endings.